



Industrial Archaeology 101: What Are We Looking At?

By S. Robert Powell

If, today, you were to stand at the edge of the engine house site at the head of Plane No. 14 on the D&H Gravity Railroad and look down at the Lackawaxen River, you would see a structure at the edge of the Lackawaxen, shown in Photo 1 (given below), which is clearly man-made. From a distance, it appears to be a bridge abutment. Upon closer examination, that hypothesis proves to be correct. There is no sign of an abutment, however, on the opposite shore of the river. Why was this bridge built? Who built it?

On the flat land, below Plane No. 14, at the edge of the Lackawaxen River, from the same vantage point by the head of Plane No. 14, you would also see, about 30 feet downstream from “the abutment” in Photo 1, the stone work that is shown in Photo 2 (given below). This stone work is laid out in a gentle curve from the right

rear to the left front of the photo, and is between three and four feet high (which is about the height of the top of the abutment). Behind the photographer is an expanse of more or less flat land about 50 yards wide and 200 yards long. Why was this stone work constructed?

Following their visit to this site on September 3, 2018, S. Robert Powell and Larry Rine, were both very focused on determining what “this abutment and stone work” at the edge of the Lackawaxen River below Plane No. 14 were all about. They began their investigation by photographing the site. They then drove to the opposite side (North) of the Lackawaxen River in the area across the river from the site shown in these photos and accessed, to the West of this area, the “Old State Road”, which was formerly named the “Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike”.

The “Old State Road” on the North shore of the Lackawaxen, across from Plane No. 14, descends the hill in a gradual curve towards the shore opposite the bridge abutment, mentioned above, on the opposite (South) shore of the Lackawaxen. The Old State Road, at that point, the forward trajectory of the road and the topography of the site both indicate, then crossed the Lackawaxen River on a bridge there, the only extant remnants of which are on South shore of the Lackawaxen River at this point. (The present roadway of the “Old State Road” now curves up and away from the river, all the while remaining on the North shore of the river as it makes its way into Honesdale.)

Having crossed the Lackawaxen River at that point the road then continued on its way to Honesdale, all the while remaining on the South shore of the Lackawaxen. The stone work in the foreground of Photo 2 might well have been part of a supporting roadway that carried the “Old State Road” / Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike to the East, onto the broad open area behind the photographer (or from that broad open area up and over the bridge to the West).

Historical note on the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike and the Lackawaxen River: One of Waymart's first settlers was Thomas Clark who had a tavern and store in Clarksville. He was also a commissioner for the Honesdale and Clarksville turnpike, which was organized April 2, 1830, and which ran from Honesdale to the Milford and Owego Turnpike in Canaan Township at the crest of the Moosic Mountain, just below the Farview station on the D&H steam line, and very near the

headwaters of the Van Tuyl creek, which flows down the mountain to Waymart. The creek that flows east from the outlet at Keen's Pond is called the Van Auken Creek. At Prompton, the Van Auken Creek flows into the west branch of the Lackawaxen River (which flows out of the Prompton Dam), which flows into Honesdale.

The Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike was organized on April 2, 1830, and construction was probably begun and completed in 1830, with construction probably beginning in Honesdale, with the turnpike heading West on the south side of the Lackawaxen River. In the Plane 14 area, the turnpike then crossed the Lackawaxen on the bridge, the ruins of which on the South shore of Lackawaxen are still extant and are shown in Photos 1 and 2. Having thus crossed the Lackawaxen River, the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike remained on the north side of the Lackawaxen and the Van Auken all the way to Keen's Pond.

Now let's take a look at the Gravity Railroad in this area. All sections of the former Six-Mile Level (later a portion of Level 12, later the steam line) between Keen's Pond and Prompton were on the South side of the Van Auken Creek. In the period 1829-1845, on the Six-Mile Level, the cars moved from Waymart to Prompton by gravity and were pulled back to Waymart by horses.

In the period 1829-1845, when the rail cars on the Six-Mile Level reached Prompton from Waymart, they were let down Plane No. 8, and entered the Four-Mile Level, which crossed the Lackawaxen River at Prompton, and continued on to Honesdale on the North side of the Lackawaxen River. A short distance from Honesdale, the cars were moved over a bridge over the Lackawaxen River and were then moved into downtown Honesdale. In the period 1829-1845, the cars on the Four-Mile Level were moved both ways (to Honesdale and back to Prompton) by horses.

In 1845, under the direction of James Archbald, major changes were made in the Gravity roadbed between Keen's Pond and Honesdale, although the 6-mile level remained unchanged. At Prompton, however, the Six-Mile Level was now connected to a new 4-mile section of track on the South shore of the Lackawaxen between Prompton and Honesdale. The Gravity trackage between Waymart and

Honesdale, now entirely on the South shore of the Lackawaxen, was now known as the Ten-Mile Level, which was graded so that the loaded coal cars moved the entire ten miles from Waymart to Honesdale by gravity: no horses needed (the empties were moved back to Waymart by means of Planes and Levels 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17).

The Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike, which up to 1845 ran all the way to Honesdale on the South shore of the Lackawaxen from the point where it crossed the Lackawaxen from the North shore to the South shore on the bridge across the Lackawaxen at Plane No. 14 (abutment and roadbed supports on South shore still there). Beginning in 1845, the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike no longer crossed the Lackawaxen on the bridge below the head of Plane No. 14. Rather, it remained on the North shore of the Lackawaxen from the Plane 14 area all the way to Honesdale.

How was this switching of turnpike roadbed for railroad roadbed and railroad roadbed for turnpike roadbed made possible? Here's what very probably took place. The D&H, which was a very powerful and influential company in 1845, most probably made an offer to the Honesdale and Clarksville turnpike group that they couldn't refuse (the details on this land "transfer" are not yet known for certain), and the roadbed swap was carried out.

Fortuitously, it was a very easy proposal for the Honesdale and Clarksville group to accept, for the very remarkable reason that by trading roadbeds both the D&H and the Turnpike group benefitted equally, because they each now had a roadbed between Keen's Pond and Honesdale entirely on one side of the Lackawaxen River, with no need for a bridge over the Lackawaxen River: the D&H on the South shore of the Lackawaxen River and the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike on the North shore of the Lackawaxen River.

Re-capitulation: For the period 1829-1845, the D&H had 4 miles of trackage on the north side of the Lackawaxen River between Prompton and Honesdale. For the period c. 1830-1845, the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike had 4 miles of roadbed on the south side of the Lackawaxen River between Honesdale and the Plane No. 14 area just east of Prompton. In 1845, the D&H and the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike traded/exchanged roadbeds between Pompton and Honesdale, which gave them both 10 miles of roadbed with no bridges over the Lackawaxen River.

The ruins on the flat land below Plane No. 14, therefore, are the bridge and roadbed remnants of the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike from circa 1830 up to no later than 1845, when the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike was re-structured between the Plane No. 14 area and Honesdale so that its complete route from Keen's Pond to Honesdale would be on the North side of the Lackawaxen River. With no further need for a bridge over the Lackawaxen River in the Plane No. 14 area, the bridge and its abutment on the North shore of the Lackawaxen, as well as most of the roadbed amenities on both shores of the river were then either removed by the turnpike company or, with the passage of time, were erased by the Lackawaxen River itself.

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Photo 1: Bridge abutment below Plane No. 14 at shoreline of Lackawaxen River (photo by S. R. Powell on September 4, 2018). We see here the abutment on the South shore of the Lackawaxen River for the Honesdale and Clarksville turnpike bridge that was erected there over the Lackawaxen River, probably in 1830, and used until no later than 1845, when the second configuration of the Gravity Railroad was installed.



Photo 2: Stone work on the flat land downstream from the abutment shown in Photo 1 (photo by Larry Rine on September 4, 2018). This stonework supported the roadbed of the Honesdale and Clarksville Turnpike in that section of the roadbed between the south shore of the Lackawaxen River and the flatland below Plane No. 14.